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ABSTRACT

Academic libraries have traditionally provided some kind of term paper assistance to patrons. Central Missouri State University's Ward Edwards Library designed a two-pronged approach to a term paper clinic (TPC), using traditional group instruction and one-on-one walk-in assistance. The primary goals of the TPC are to teach the student to: (1) select an appropriate topic; (2) locate reference materials; (3) utilize both print and electronic periodical indexes; (4) use a systematic approach to conducting research, keeping bibliographic cards, taking notes, and organizing a final draft; and (5) learn evaluative skills needed to select appropriate sources. A second research assistance event is "Research Rescue," an individualized approach to providing assistance to students doing library research. Research Rescue services include providing individual assistance at a point of need; offering walk-in help during an entire week; locating and using appropriate library resources; and involving the bibliographers for specialized individual research. (AEF)

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ED 391 531

BASIC TRAINING:

A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH TO TERM PAPER ASSISTANCE

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Abstract

Academic libraries have traditionally provided some kind of term paper assistance to patrons. These services usually include either group sessions, individual assistance, or both and concentrate on finding and utilizing appropriate library resources. We designed a two-pronged approach to a term paper clinic, using traditional group instruction -- a return to the basics in organizational methods of outlining, note taking, and bib cards -- and Research Rescue, using subject specialists for one-on-one walk-in assistance. With constant changes in technological access, college students need good instruction in selecting and analyzing resources, along with a systematic approach to organizing research.

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BASIC TRAINING:

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Introduction

Academic librarians have supported term paper counseling or assistance for years. While some libraries rely solely on the regularly staffed reference desk to provide this service, many others have established group or individual approaches to serve this need. Typically aimed at undergraduates, such services have taken many forms by various names such as "term paper counseling," "term paper workshop," and "term paper assistance."

Naturally, no single approach to term paper assistance is suitable for all libraries or all students. Ward Edwards Library has, over the past five years, developed a two-pronged approach to serve our undergraduate students' needs in this area: a typical Term Paper Clinic, and a one-on-one Research Rescue.

As a comprehensive regional university located in Warrensburg, Missouri, Central Missouri State University has a student population of 9,439 undergraduates and 2,262 graduates. The student population is diverse, with many students from small rural high schools and others from large urban schools in the St. Louis and Kansas City metropolitan areas. Non-traditional and international students make up an increasingly significant portion of the student body.

Many of these students are unprepared for the academic challenges of the university. Little experience utilizing a

library collection of any size is a limiting factor for much of the student population. The classroom assignment of a research project or term paper is often the first time a student is required to use library resources on more than a cursory basis, such as copying from a general encyclopedia. Despite anecdotal evidence of increased usage of library resources, reference staff still encounter juniors and even seniors who declare that library usage has not been a required component of their academic experience. In addition, most students have never been taught the basic organizational skills necessary to assimilate information and to construct a paper.

The reference staff has typically handled requests for all types of research assistance. However, for several years that staff has been struggling under increased demand for assistance from students using products of the new technology: CD-ROM databases, FirstSearch service, and Internet access. These added duties for the reference staff, coupled with their responsibility for traditional reference work, which has also increased in volume, has necessitated a different approach.

Term Paper Clinic

In 1991, Ward Edwards Library instituted a Term Paper Clinic (TPC) and began experimenting with various methods of responding to our clients' needs in this area. A review of the literature at that time revealed a good number of examples to emulate (Belanger and Emmick 1981; Ellsbury 1983; Rothstein 1989). We

proceeded to create a workshop specific to the needs of our patrons. Our first clinic included information on selecting a topic, finding sources, and writing the paper and incorporated a segment on word processing. However, it was difficult to cover all of these areas well. Because the University's Educational Development Center has a Writing Lab which assists students needing help with the actual writing process, the TPC coordinators dropped this component from the Clinic. We strengthened the segment on the organizational process to emphasize not only how to use library resources, but how to organize the information.

Scheduling

The current format for the TPC has remained relatively unchanged over the last three years. Twice a year, during the spring and fall semesters, the TPC coordinators determine appropriate dates and publicize the event through flyers circulated to appropriate faculty members and services (such as the Writing Lab) and posted across campus. A Library Services brochure, advertising all Library Services workshops, also lists the event. Students are asked to register for the TPC in the office of the Dean of Library Services. Reference desk personnel recommend the TPC to patrons who might appear to benefit from the clinic. Although many students would seem to fit into this category, the numbers have never reflected the need. Typically, between ten and fifteen students attend the TPC.

Although the TPC is usually held in the evening hours, the

coordinators of the event have also experimented with afternoon hours. Timing the TPC is problematic: if held too early in the semester, the students do not feel the need for it; obviously, if held too late, the pressing need has passed. The TPC coordinators have attempted to conduct the clinic approximately three weeks before many classes' major assignments are due.

Each TPC is scheduled for one 2 1/2 hour session. Depending on the number of students registered and the schedules of the coordinators, there are either one or two librarians assigned to each TPC. We have discussed the advisability of dividing students according to discipline, in which case the appropriate subject bibliographer would conduct the clinic. However, the low number of participants has not made such a plan realistic.

Goals of the Term Paper Clinic

The primary goals of the TPC are to teach the student to:

1) select an appropriate topic for a term paper, narrowing or broadening focus as necessary.

2) locate reference materials such as subject encyclopedias and dictionaries, biographical information, bibliographies, etc.

3) utilize appropriate periodical indexes, both print and electronic.

4) conduct research in an orderly fashion, using a systematic approach to keeping bibliographic or "bib" cards, taking notes, and organizing a final draft.

5) learn evaluative skills needed to select appropriate sources.

As mentioned earlier, the TPC does not attempt to deal with concerns which relate directly to writing skills, such as how to

develop a good topic sentence or effectively utilize supporting detail. Neither does the TPC attempt to teach word processing skills necessary to complete the finished product. The TPC coordinators decided that, given the brief amount of time available for the clinic, it is imperative to concentrate on what we do best and refer students to other individuals or services on campus when needed.

Outline of the Term Paper Clinic

I. **Introduction**

II. **Choosing and Limiting a Topic**

III. **Library Resources:** Reference Materials, The On-Line Catalog, Print Indexes, CD-Roms

IV. **Eight Steps in Writing a Research Paper**

V. **To the Trenches:** Individual Time to Conduct a Sample Search in the Reference Area

VI. **Conclusion:** Overview, Evaluation, and Referral

A more detailed explanation of each component of the Term Paper Clinic follows. In the **introduction**, the TPC Coordinators and participants are introduced. The librarians review the goals and focus of the clinic. Each student is given a packet which includes copies of the outline above, the eight-step process, explanatory sheets of the transparencies used, and various library research guides.

We then discuss the process of **choosing and limiting a topic** to find a subject suitable for research. We encourage students to select a topic in which they are interested; to be certain that adequate materials are available; to remain flexible,

realizing that it is often necessary to modify the original topic; to avoid straight biography; and, in general, to choose a subject that can be presented in an objective fashion. Unless the assignment is to write an argumentative essay, the research paper is not the place for arguments and persuasion. We emphasize that students must limit the topic so that it is not too broad or too narrow. Overhead transparencies are utilized in this segment, with examples of topics that may be made more or less broad in approach.

Our next step is to familiarize students with basic **library resources**. Many are unaware of the existence of such reference essentials as subject encyclopedias, dictionaries, and bibliographies. We describe various types of sources, with examples of each. Evaluation of reference sources is also discussed; this topic has taken on increased importance as a result of the vast array of resources easily available over the Internet. Usually the Coordinators select a theme to follow throughout the Clinic. For instance, we have used Sexual Harassment, Teacher Unions, and History of Jazz Music as examples of potential topics for research papers. This allows us to provide concrete examples of appropriate sources. Our primary goal in this segment is not to introduce the participants to any specific sources, but to illustrate types of reference materials available.

We then review the importance of periodical indexes, with examples of both indexing and abstracting tools. A transparency

of a page taken from Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature is used to illustrate a sample citation and the search process. An important aspect of this portion is the demonstration of electronic indexes, using one or two of our popular CD-Rom databases. The typically small group size provides an opportunity to search for topics of interest to some of the students. We also demonstrate the use of LUIS, the on-line catalog. While most students have at least a superficial understanding of LUIS, they are often unaware of the possibilities of keyword searching and other more sophisticated types of searches.

Organization Strategy

The component of the TPC which focuses most directly on the process of writing a research paper uses an **eight-step** approach. We emphasize that this very simple, old-fashioned system has been used for many years with great success and is not original to the instructors. Many basic English handbooks and style manuals contain instructions in preparing research papers with very similar step-by-step approaches. Modern technology such as computer word processing has not eliminated the need for basic outlining, note taking, and bibliographic skills. We stress this basic systematic method of research and synthesis since most students have not been taught these primary principles in secondary school. We have tried to make the process linear and easily understood to students who are feeling overwhelmed by it.

The eight steps are:

1. **Read background information for general overview of topic**
2. **Prepare bib cards**
3. **Prepare a preliminary outline**
4. **Read and take notes**
5. **Assemble notes**
6. **Write the final outline**
7. **Write the first draft**
8. **Write the final draft with introduction, conclusion, footnotes, and a final bibliography.**

We discuss each step in detail. Throughout this phase of the Clinic, transparencies are heavily used to illustrate bib cards, outlining, and note cards. The emphasis is on the process of using these tools to make a seemingly overwhelming task much more manageable. We include a discussion of plagiarism and the importance of attributing credit where due using footnotes or endnotes.

After we have described the process of identifying major topics as main divisions of the subject, reworking the outline, collecting information using the bib cards and note cards, and writing the first draft, the students often have many questions. Some of these relate to narrowing the focus of the paper, providing proof for statements made, attributing credit where appropriate, etc. Many, however, are outside the focus of the Term Paper Clinic. Students often have very detailed questions concerning a particular style manual, word processing, or writing

mechanics. For questions such as these, we answer very briefly and refer the student to the appropriate place for additional help. The packet contains informational brochures about other campus services.

After the formal Term Paper Clinic is completed, the group adjourns to the Reference Area for **"To the Trenches"**, where the librarians offer individualized support to the clinic participants. We help the students clarify the research topic, narrow it if needed, and locate appropriate sources. If necessary, we schedule individual appointments to meet again.

Our **conclusion** of the TPC is an evaluation of the event. The students are asked to complete an evaluation form found in their packet. The evaluations have always been very positive.

Research Rescue

For two years, Ward Edwards Library has conducted a second research assistance event, similar in intent to the Term Paper Clinic. "Research Rescue" is a totally individualized approach to providing assistance to students doing library research. Research Rescue most closely fits the definition some institutions use for TPC: "a form of individualized reference service and user education whereby students receive one-on-one instruction on how to locate and use resource materials relevant to their term paper topics" (Auster, Devakos, and Meikle 1994, 551). The trend in term paper clinics in recent years has been toward an individualized approach. Donegan suggests that this

approach is especially valuable given the increasingly heterogeneous student population (Donegan, Domas, and Deosdade 1989, 195). Rothstein points out that, while group instruction has its merits, the "point of need" approach takes term paper assistance a step further (Rothstein, 257). We decided that our students could benefit from both the traditional TPC and a new, more individualized approach.

Goals of Research Rescue

The goals of Research Rescue are to:

1. provide individual assistance at a point of need.
2. offer walk-in help during an entire week.
3. locate and use appropriate library resources.
4. involve the bibliographers for specialized individual research.

The first year the event was held, we underestimated the amount of librarian time required. The second year, the coordinators of the event solicited support from the other Public Services librarians. We selected a week in late October for Research Rescue, which was held for four days for a period of two hours each day. The Library Services Workshops brochure, distributed early in the semester, included Research Rescue. In addition, posters circulated near the time of the event, an article in the campus newspaper, and personal referrals given to students seeking assistance at the Reference desk advertised the effort. Students were advised that one-on-one help from a librarian would be available during that time. The librarians decided to emphasize the "drop-in" nature of the event. Unlike

our group Term Paper Clinic which requests advance registration, Research Rescue encourages students to stop by the Reference desk without any prior commitment.

While Research Rescue may sound like typical reference desk service, there are several differences. The most obvious is that individuals working at the Reference desk are often not able to provide the kind of in-depth help a patron needs. Research Rescue has allowed librarians to spend more time with students who need their expertise. Although the librarian may eventually have to leave to help another student, an important contact has been established. Students may set up an appointment for a later date with the librarian if needed. By making themselves available for further consultation, Research Rescue librarians are making another distinction from typical reference service, in which students receive assistance from the person on duty at the time.

Conclusion

The librarians decided to continue both formats of term paper assistance because there are advantages to each. The group approach allows time to cover such basics as the mechanics of making bib cards and a review of basic print and non-print indexes. In addition, it allows for efficient use of library personnel, who can meet the needs of a large number of people simultaneously. It provides relative anonymity for students wishing to be part of a larger group. Research Rescue, conversely, is quite inefficient in terms of librarian time

expended. It is very limiting in that there is not adequate time to "start from square one" with students who might benefit from a very basic and linear discussion of the research process. On the other hand, there are numerous benefits. The primary advantage of Research Rescue is that many students prefer an individualized approach. Experienced reference librarians know that many patrons find libraries and librarians to be threatening. The one-on-one approach serves to dampen this fear, allowing the student his "own" librarian for a brief time. This non-threatening, personal approach has merit from a psychological standpoint for many students. The other primary benefit is that the individualized approach permits the librarian to concentrate solely on that particular client's needs. After determining the student's prior experience with research papers, with libraries in general, and especially with this library, the librarian is able to address the unique needs and expectations of the individual.

Both the Term Paper Clinic and Research Rescue reflect traditional methods of finding information and writing a research paper. While utilizing relatively new technological advances such as searching CD-Roms and the on-line catalog, the emphasis is on a process which is minimally impacted by recent technology. It has been our experience that many of our students do not have the firm foundation required in this area. Many of the reference librarians have pointed out that, while it may be more exciting to concentrate on newer, "flashier" tools such as the World Wide

Web and FirstSearch, it is imperative to lay the necessary groundwork. Students still need to be able to find the needed information, to evaluate sources, and to use a systematic approach to organizing their thoughts. In fact, the plethora of sources available to library users does not ease their task but makes it more difficult.

> Encouraging students to create bibliographies, especially via CD-ROM printouts, without teaching them how to evaluate the sources may send them on the trail of less significant books, or it may leave them so overwhelmed that they never read books at all and turn to brief reportage instead. (Christensen 1994, 203)

The challenge reference and bibliographic instruction librarians face in the future is not lessened but heightened by the every-increasing array of electronic information sources and services. Critical thinking plays a growing role in the evaluation of sources available for use. Librarians must teach undergraduate students the finding and evaluative skills required for effective research. Utilizing the two-pronged approach to close this gap, the formally organized Term Paper Clinic and the drop-in Research Rescue, we have been better able to respond to students' increased demands for help in gathering sources and writing research papers.

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